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Sports and GT cars; [FIVE STAR SPORTS FINAL Edition]

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Abstract (Document Summary)

General Motors cars in its class, and nice braking and handling. Opt for the newly available 200-horsepower V-8 and forget underpowered 140-horsepower V-6 and rough 210-horsepower supercharged six-cylinder. Excessive weight adversely affects fuel economy. Mitsubishi 3000 GT, 3000 GT VR-4, \$19,059-\$30,800: Made in the same plant in Japan as the Dodge Stealth Basically the same as the Stealth, which makes it a slinky, above-average buy. The less-expensive models are fine, but the 300-horsepower, four-wheel-drive model is a perfect Chicago winter performance car. Nissan 300ZX, \$28,175-\$35,505: Heads-on Corvette competitor with either non-turbocharged 222-horsepower V-6 or 300-horsepower turbocharged V-6. Excellent handling, and very refined and comfortable for such a high-performance sports car. Handling on slippery winter roads leaves much to be desired with standard tires.

be able to buy it for near its \$18,970 dealer invoice price. Powered by a masterpiece of a double-overhead-camshaft, 220-horsepower Yamaha race-style V-6, it has the handling and braking to match its acceleration. Roomy and practical, but no automatic transmission offered. Ford Escort GT, \$11,484: The GT version of Escort is a bargain little GT car, thanks mainly to its dual-camshaft, multi-valve, 127-horsepower, four-cylinder Mazda engine. The GT also gets a sport suspension, four-wheel disc brakes, tachometer and low-profile performance tires. Lots of bang for the buck.

Full Text (953 words)

Copyright Chicago Sun Times May 28, 1991

Sports and GT (Grand Touring) autos are the quintessential "drivers' cars."

Even a trip to the local store is enjoyable in them because they have the acceleration, steering, handling and braking that makes it fun to slide behind the wheel. The seats and instrumentation are a cut above what you'll find in an average car.

But trips to the local store aren't what these cars are all about. They're meant for safe, rapid travel on demanding roads, such as winding country lanes or little-traveled two-lane blacktops that people drove before interstate highways. Driving on interstates in a sports or GT car is mostly a bore because ho-hum cars are best suited to interstate motoring.

Sports and GT cars are lithe, responsive machines that invite their driver to mix it up with challenging road conditions.

Sports cars once were lots more uncomfortable than GT autos, with overly stiff springs, side curtains instead of roll-up windows and little sound insulation.

But a competitive market has resulted in most of today's sports cars being as comfortable as GT autos, which always were comfortable because they were developed in Europe for high-speed travel between major cities and countries.

You didn't take a high-speed train or airplane. You drove your GT car. In Europe, GT cars still are extensively used for rapid, long-distance travel, although their style has been crimped a bit by heavier traffic.

Still, wide-open roads either in Europe or here aren't needed to enjoy a responsive sports or GT car. They're a kick the moment you get them rolling. Acura NSX, \$61,000-\$65,000: Japan's first true Ferrari fighter. Most costly Japanese car ever sold in United States, and world's first car made almost entirely of aluminum. Exotic speed, appearance, handling and braking. A smoothie. More refined than most exotic sports cars, but almost too refined.

[Table]

BMW 850i, \$73,600: Extraordinary performance with 296-horsepower

V-12, with handling and braking to match. Styling is slick, but car not really the neck-turner it should be for the price. Smooth six-speed manual is the way to go if you don't need to drive much in heavy traffic, which is no place for this 100-m.p.h. cruiser, anyway. Buick Reatta, \$29,300-\$35,965: Move fast because Buick soon discontinues this gorgeous auto, which is a GT auto, not a sports car, despite its two-seat capacity. Good bet to be future collectible, with \$35,965 convertible best bet for high resale. Hardtop more practical, and still plenty nice. Roomy and fun to drive, but too "soft" for really aggressive driving.

[Table]

Ford Taurus SHO, \$22,071: A slow-selling "sleeper," so you should

be able to buy it for near its \$18,970 dealer invoice price. Powered by a masterpiece of a double-overhead-camshaft, 220-horsepower Yamaha race-style V-6, it has the handling and braking to match its acceleration. Roomy and practical, but no automatic transmission offered. Ford Escort GT, \$11,484: The GT version of Escort is a bargain little GT car, thanks mainly to its dual-camshaft, multi-valve, 127-horsepower, four-cylinder Mazda engine. The GT also gets a sport suspension, four-wheel disc brakes, tachometer and low-profile performance tires. Lots of bang for the buck.

[Table]

Ford Thunderbird, \$15,318-\$20,999: Drop-dead styling that outdoes

General Motors cars in its class, and nice braking and handling. Opt for the newly available 200-horsepower V-8 and forget underpowered 140-horsepower V-6 and rough 210-horsepower supercharged six-cylinder. Excessive weight adversely affects fuel economy. Mitsubishi 3000 GT, 3000 GT VR-4, \$19,059-\$30,800: Made in the same plant in Japan as the Dodge Stealth Basically the same as the Stealth, which makes it a slinky, above-average buy. The less-expensive models are fine, but the 300-horsepower, four-wheel-drive model is a perfect Chicago winter performance car. Nissan 300ZX, \$28,175-\$35,505: Heads-on Corvette competitor with either non-turbocharged 222-horsepower V-6 or 300-horsepower turbocharged V-6. Excellent handling, and very refined and comfortable for such a high-performance sports car. Handling on slippery winter roads leaves much to be desired with standard tires.

[Table]

Dodge Spirit R/T, \$17,871: The heart of this practical four-door

GT sedan is its turbocharged, double-overhead-camshaft four-cylinder that generates 224 horsepower and provides scalding acceleration. Handling is good, as is fuel economy, at an EPA-estimated 19 m.p.g. in the city and 27 on the highway. No automatic transmission offered. Cadillac Allante, \$57,260-\$62,810: Forget the list price. Most Chicago area Caddy dealers likely will sell you the car in the upper-\$40,000 range, and it's a steal at that figure. Custom-made-in-Italy Pininfarina body. Reliable Caddy 200-horsepower V-8 makes it very fast, and other Caddy mechanicals make it reliable. Comfortable cockpit. Superb handling and braking. Who needs a Ferrari for more than twice the price? The underrated Allante is an exotic that's practical to drive daily, but lacks prestige of Mercedes-Benz two-seaters.

[Table]

Honda Prelude, \$15,095-\$19,650: Nothing flashy, but solid,

well-balanced fun car. Handles admirably. Basically a two-seater because of its tight back seat, but luxurious and comfortable up front. Infiniti Q45, \$40,000-\$45,000: Fantastic, smooth 278-horsepower V-8 provides swift acceleration to speeds so high you don't even want to know about them. Slick styling and great ride, comfort and handling. Detroit's got nothing like it, but it's far from cheap.

[Table]

Porsche 911, \$60,700-\$95,000: Unique with its air-cooled,

rear-mounted engine, 911 provides civilized, race-car-style driving. Base Carrera, four-wheel-drive Carrera 4 and turbocharged Turbo Coupe all will steal your heart. You probably won't even notice the traditionally haphazard placement of 911 dash controls, but you'd best have a thick wallet to handle the payments. Innovative Tiptronic automatic transmission is a first for 911, which debuted in less-refined form in 1963. Chevrolet Lumina Z34, \$17,275: This car helps show that America has strongly returned to the GT car field. Powered by General Motors' new, impressive, dual-camshaft, 24-valve 3.4-liter V-6, which pumps out 210 horsepower. Spacious and practical, with an EPA-estimated highway fuel economy rating of 27 m.p.g.